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ABSTRACT

For the last year, the Rural Libraries and the Humanities Project has assisted 30 rural libraries in Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma in developing locally initiated humanities programs. Program packets focusing on heritage, literature, and women were prepared to aid in program development. Development of unique local programs was also encouraged. Project staff gave assistance in the formation of local steering committees and in the program development process. Success was directly related to the active participation of the steering committees. In many communities, the program ceased to be a library project and became a community project. Flagler, Colorado closed Main Street in order to stage "Country School Legacy," a program which effectively involved the total community. Stafford, Kansas presented four programs which focused on Kansas writers and poets. Tonkawa, Oklahoma created a slide-tape program of historical photographs representing the early years of the community. Over 60 programs have been developed and presented, and nearly all of the participating libraries wish to continue developing humanities programs. Information on how other nonprofit organizations can conduct similar programs can be obtained from the Colorado Humanities Program, the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, or the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities. (DC)

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The Humanities Flourish in Rural Communities

by

Paul G. McKenna

The Rural Community Education Report

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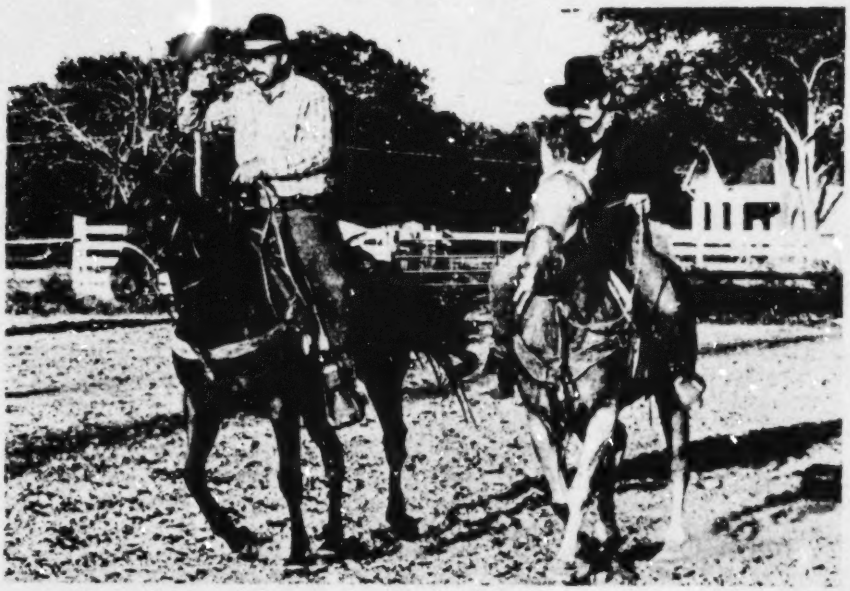
"The Humanities Flourish In Rural Communities"



Ashland Public Library introduced humanities programming at the July 4 celebrations. A pageant "Frontier Days — 1884" was presented to an appreciative audience.

By Paul G. McKenna

"We set up chairs for 50 and 150 came." Goodland, Kansas. Main Street was closed on Sunday afternoon for a large display of antique cars and farm equipment; Flagler, Colorado. In Oskaloosa, Kansas a small stage coach pulled by a team of Shetland ponies gave children rides. The librarian in Trinidad, Colorado said: "I'm sorry we did not have a larger facility to accommodate all the people who attended. When people saw we were filled to capacity, they didn't even enter, and turned back at the door." "I thoroughly enjoyed this." "Let's have more." "When's your next program?" were a few of the comments in Olsburg and Westmoreland, Kansas. For what? Library humanities programs.

The Rural Libraries and the Humanities Project, based at the University for Man, Kansas State University, has assisted rural libraries in developing locally initiated humanities programming for the last year. Developed by UFM's Outreach Department, the project was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Thirty libraries in Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma were selected to participate in the grant; all participating libraries served a rural population in communities of under 10,000. The grant provided training and technical assistance for the librarians and funding for two humanities programs in each community.

Programs were developed based upon three program packets: Heritage of the Plains and Mountains, Literature of the Plains and Mountains, and Women of the Plains and Mountains. The packets contained an overview of the humanities, an introduction to humanities programming, program suggestions, a listing of humanities scholars with topical expertise, an extensive bibliography, a listing of support materials and additional resources, plus an adaptation of the guide "Planning Library Programs" by Peggy O'Donnell.[1] While prepared humanities programs were available in the three program packets, all communities were encouraged to develop their own humanities programs unique to their community or region within the grant guidelines.

Project staff gave assistance to librarians in the formation of local steering committees and guidance in the program development process. The local steering committees were based upon the free university, community education model. The all-volunteer committees were working groups with decision-making power. In most communities the steering committee consisted of four to eight members, plus a humanities scholar, as required by the grant. The most successful committees were comprised of community leaders and representatives from various social and professional organizations within the community. Mayors and other elected officials served on committees in several communities. In other towns, ministers, club presidents, library board members, representatives from the business community, homemakers, and one or two representatives from the school system rounded out the committees.

The programming success of the project was directly related to the active participation and involvement of the local steering committees. The quality of humanities programming was higher in those communities where the steering committee enthusiastically adopted the project. Indicators of successful programs were greater audience satisfaction and higher attendance levels.

The programming success was dependent upon several variables:

- The librarian's or project director's enthusiasm for the project.
- The frequency of committee meetings. Most met every two weeks as programs were developed and more frequently as the program deadline approached.
- Assignment of committee members to subcommittees for tasks of scheduling the program and checking for conflicts, obtaining suitable facilities, contact with humanities scholars, developing a budget, publicity, and refreshments.
- Use of the Delphi method to determine community interest in program topics. This is a needs assessment technique based upon asking questions with forced choice answers.
- The establishment and adherence to time lives.
- An aggressive publicity campaign. In some communities news releases were released every time the steering committee met.
- The involvement of many diverse groups and people from the community in the overall project.

In many communities the humanities program ceased being a library project and became a community project. For example, when Flagler, Colorado, presented its second humanities program, " Country School Legacy" they closed Main Street for a large display of antique cars and farm machinery, a senior citizen mountaineer band played, elementary school children sang, a film was shown, several citizens spoke, and dozens of people donated homemade cookies for refreshments. Librarian Jean Strode commented: "People were all over Main Street; we couldn't count them all." They estimated over 300 people attended the program. Country School Legacy was a success because Strode and her steering committee effectively involved the total community in the project. By the time the program was offered everyone in the community knew about it and most had been involved in some way. The community took ownership of the program and pride in it; as a result hundreds of people attended and enjoyed the program.

Stafford, Kansas presented four programs under the "big tent" of the "Stafford Chautauqua." In keeping with the original chautauquas, programs examined Stafford's heritage — its past, present and future — using a variety of program formats, from lectures to panel and group discussions. The second program was based upon the Literature of the Plains and Mountains program packet. Steven Hind, poet and English instructor from Hutchinson Community College, read selections from his work and led a discussion on the significance of being a Kansas writer. Included in the program was the Stafford Drama Guild reading and interpreting the works of Kansas writers, including the work of local writers and poets. Once again, the local steering committee determined topics of interest in Stafford and encouraged involvement by many segments of the community in developing and presenting the program. As an outgrowth of this program the library has printed *A Chautauqua Reader*.

The steering committee in Tonkawa, Oklahoma, took on an ambitious program of collecting and reproducing historical photographs representing the early years of the Tonkawa community for a slide-tape program. They so effectively involved the community at large that former residents from as far away as Oregon and Florida donated memorabilia for the program. The evening of the program, so many people attended that the librarian, Sally Caughlin, had to present the program twice. Requests to use the slide-tape program continue to pour in from local clubs, schools and county organizations.

Rural libraries are more than repositories for books. Tonkawa Public Library sponsored a humanities program on pioneer women entitled "Petticoats Across the Prairie."

In total over 60 programs have been developed and presented under the Rural Libraries and the Humanities Project, with well over 4,500 people attending the programs in three states. Nearly all of the participating libraries wish to continue developing humanities programs. This project has been successful because the communities made it so, because the local steering committees in three states worked to improve their communities through the guidance of the Rural Libraries and the Humanities Project. This project has shown that rural libraries can be more than repositories of books; that rural libraries can provide quality humanities programming; and rural libraries can become vital adult learning centers.

Information on how other non-profit organizations can conduct similar humanities programming can be obtained from the Colorado Humanities Program in Denver, the Kansas Committee for the Humanities in Topeka, or the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities in Oklahoma City. All three organizations encourage participation in the humanities and would welcome the opportunity to work with interested communities.

Communities participating in the Rural Libraries and the Humanities Project were:

Colorado libraries: Ault, Conifer, La Jara Eads, Flagler, Hayden, Leadville, Palisade, Trinidad, Victor.

Kansas libraries: Ashland, St. Marys, Goodland, Kingman, Linwood, Marysville, Oskaloosa, Phillipsburg, Stafford.

Oklahoma libraries: Boley, Haskell, Hollis, Purcell, Tonkawa, Westville, Wynnewood.

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[1] The booklets are available for $5.00 from: The University for Man, 1221 Thurston Street, Manhattan, KS 66502.